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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to describe an institute on basic skills that was organized for faculty members at a historically black, public, four-year, urban-oriented, "open admissions" college. Specifically, the described institute was designed to develop positive faculty attitudes toward incorporating the teaching of basic skills into the content areas and to teach the faculty members specific instructional practices to use with their students. The first part of the paper discusses the institute's program design, which included addresses by guest speakers; general procedures helpful in all content areas; workshop sessions dealing with expository writing, basic mathematics, reading/study strategies in various content areas, library usage, and speech communication; a general faculty meeting; and department meetings. The second section of the paper discusses the faculty members' evaluation of the institute, which was positive. (FL)

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University Faculty Institute Emphasizes Basic Skills in the Content Areas

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The importance of faculty reinforcement of basic skills (reading, study, writing, mathematics, speech) in the content areas has been emphasized as a critical factor in the academic achievement of "high-risk" students (Moore, 1970) in community colleges and universities (Bahe, 1969; Kolzow, 1972; Twining, 1972). The academic achievement of "high-risk" students is the collective responsibility of all faculty members and should never be viewed as the sole responsibility of the basic skills faculty. Basic skills faculty at the community college/university level should emphasize the application of basic skills in the content areas by using the student's textbooks and other instructional materials as the primary tools for instruction and by diplomatically -- but forcefully -- asserting the need for faculty to fuse the teaching of basic skills with the teaching of content.

The success of stimulating faculty involvement in the reinforcement of basic skills in the content area depends on at least three factors: (1) developing positive attitudes toward incorporating the teaching of basic skills into the content areas; (2) teaching faculty specific instructional practices to use with their students; and (3) serving as consultants to the faculty in implementing the specific instructional practices developed in (2).

The purpose of this article is to describe a Faculty Institute on Basic Skills organized for faculty members at an historically Black, public, 4-year, urban-oriented, "open admissions" institution. The Institute was designed to implement factors (1) and (2) above.

The Institute was planned by a faculty committee consisting of representatives from each of the basic skills programs (reading, writing, mathematics, speech) and the university library. Overall coordination and funding was provided by the Center for Curriculum Improvement.

Program Design

Faculty Institutes are held at the university prior to the start of each Fall and Spring semester. The usual format includes 1½ days of deliberation on topics of concern and interest to the general faculty (approval of Faculty Constitution, revision of General Education requirements, etc.), an address by the President and other university officials, a general faculty meeting and departmental meetings. All faculty members are required to attend the Faculty Institute.

The following discussion highlights the design of the Faculty Institute on Basic Skills:

Thursday, January 5, 1978

9:15 - Workshop Registration

Faculty registered for two afternoon workshops based on their content area and/or interest.

9:30 - Remarks by President

President of the University discussed historic commitment of university and of historically Black colleges and universities to the "high-risk" student and emphasized need for active faculty involvement in the basic skills programs.

10:00 - Workshop Overview - President of the Faculty Senate

President of the Faculty Senate reviewed the agenda for the Institute and reiterated need for faculty involvement in the basic skills programs.

10:15 - Introduction of Guest Speaker

The author emphasized the role of basic skills faculty as consultants to content-area faculty in integrating basic skills in the content areas.

10:20 - Address: Dr. Addie S. Mitchell, Director, College Reading Program, Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, and member, Board of Directors, International Reading Association

Dr. Mitchell delivered a rousing -- almost Messianic -- speech, stressing the tremendous potential of "high-risk" students and the unique role that historically Black institutions have played in developing and nurturing this potential (see Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971, pp. 29-31; Willie and Edmonds, 1978).

11:00 - Question and Answer Period

Dr. Mitchell's speech sparked a great deal of enthusiasm on the part of the faculty. Questions focused on such issues as the academic potential of "high-risk" students and the politics of developmental studies in post-secondary education.

11:30 - Tips on General Procedures Helpful in All Content Areas

The author demonstrated Cornell System for Taking Notes (Pauk, 1974, pp. 125-139) and the PQ4R Method of Studying a Textbook. The purpose of the demonstration was to whet the appetites of faculty

for practical strategies to be developed in afternoon workshops.

12:00 - Lunch

Faculty were asked to dine together in the Faculty Club so as to share critical and creative responses to perspectives developed in morning session.

1:15 - Workshops -- Segment I
to
2:15 Basic skills faculty conducted workshops on a variety of topics designed to teach faculty practical strategies to use with students and to integrate with content. Hand-out materials and the use of multi-media approaches were utilized to enable faculty to learn by vivid example to apply the strategies discussed. Open discussion and a free exchange of ideas were stressed in the workshop sessions. The following 15 workshops were offered:

A. Expository Writing

1. Types of Expository Essays
2. Concepts Involved in Grammatical Comprehension
3. Basic Grammar and Punctuation
4. Preparing the Essay Examination: A Multi-Disciplinary Approach
5. Multi-Media Approach to Teaching, Observation, Inference and Description
6. Writing Clinic Staff Open House

B. Basic Mathematics

7. Surprise Tactics

C. Reading/Study Strategies In:

8. Mathematics, Science, Home Economics

9. History, Social Science, Social Work, ROTC, Psychology, Business, Education

10. Fine Arts, English Literature, Humanities, Foreign Language

11. Rapid Reading Techniques

12. Overview of Effective College Study Techniques

D. Library

13. Library Tour

14. Library Skills: Essential Skills for Lifetime Learning

E. Speech

15. Speech Communication: A Part of Liberal Arts, the Humanities and Basic Skills

2:30 to 3:30 - Workshops -- Segment II
Repeat of workshops

Friday, January 6, 1978

9:30 - Introduction of Guest Speaker

9:35 - Address: Dr. Richard A. Donovan, Director, Networks, Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education

Networks, a project of The Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), uses conferences and workshops to facilitate communication between faculty seeking to improve programs for "high-risk" students and others who have developed promising, adaptable solutions. Dr. Donovan shared findings from the ten institutions that were chosen to be Associates of National Project II: Alternatives

to the Revolving Door, a FIBSE project designed to select ten exemplary post secondary programs for "high-risk" students underprepared to initiate college level work. The critical aspects of these ten programs were highlighted and possibilities for replication by Morgan State University emphasized.

10:10 - Panel: University Commitment to Basic Skills; Moderator: President of the Faculty Senate; Panelists: President of the University, Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Vice-President for Business and Fiscal Affairs, representative from Maryland State Board for Higher Education (MSBHE), the author as a representative from the basic skills programs; and two upperclass students who had completed basic skills programs as freshmen.

A significant highlight of the Faculty Institute, the discussion centered on the need for adequate funding for the basic skills programs and the negative consequences of a Maryland State Board for Higher Education proposal to restrict remedial/developmental programs to public, 2-year colleges.

11:15 - Question and Answer Period

Faculty concerns focused on the future of basic skills programs at Morgan State University in light of the MSBHE proposal to have the public community colleges assume the burden for remedial/developmental studies. The executive officers of the university pledged additional support for the basic skills programs and renewed efforts to insure that the university would continue its historic role in meeting

the needs of "high-risk" students.

12:00 - Lunch

1:15 - General Faculty Meeting

3:00 - Departmental Meetings

Evaluation

Questionnaires were administered to the faculty to assess their self-evaluation of the Faculty Institute on Basic Skills. The results of the self-evaluation were positive; the faculty indicated interest in continuing efforts to provide practical alternatives to teaching "high-risk" students at the university.

Further, department chairpersons were asked to provide the Center for Curriculum Improvement with a collective statement concerning their department's involvement in the basic skills programs at Morgan State University. Specifically, department chairpersons were asked to respond to the following questions:

(1) Was your department able to benefit from the recent Faculty Institute on Basic Skills? If so, how?

(2) As a Department/Program, would you be interested in additional workshops in your discipline concerning basic skills?

(3) Would you like assistance in creating a systematic program in basic skills in your department?

(4) Are there detailed procedures in your department that are specifically designed to provide assistance to students who are identified as having problems in basic skills?

If so, please provide a written copy of these procedures.

(5) Is there a designated person charged with the function of coordinating the basic skills effort for your department? If so, please identify that person.

Responses by department chairpersons generally indicated the lack of systematic intervention strategies for "high-risk" students and an interest in developing a systematic approach to basic skills at the departmental level.

However, the most important indicator of the success of the Faculty Institute is the extent of faculty involvement in reinforcing basic skills in the content areas and any resulting improvement in academic achievement of "high-risk" students in these content-area classes (Maxwell, 1971). A corollary to this is the extent of involvement of basic skills faculty in serving as consultants to the regular faculty in fusing basic skills and content. There has been cause for optimism over the past 1½ academic years. However, much staff development activity and basic skills research remains to be done.

One university administrator and professor of biological sciences, for example, has been working with a member of the College Reading/Study Center (CR/SC) staff to develop techniques and approaches for teaching word-attack-skills based on the technical vocabulary encountered in the textbook. A faculty member in the School of Business and Management has been working with CR/SC staff to develop techniques for teaching technical vocabulary and comprehension skills in his

content area.

The basic skills programs at the university are currently being reorganized under the framework of a Lower Division. It is the author's expectation that the Lower Division will evolve into a College of Basic Studies or College of General Studies à la Boston University. Such a development would contribute to the integration of basic skills in the content areas since the College would have executive responsibility for the curriculum and faculty during the student's freshman and sophomore years. The Dean and department chairpersons in such a College would be in a stronger position to monitor basic skills development in lower division courses and to facilitate articulation between faculty within the basic skills programs and freshmen programs and faculty who specilize in intermediate and upper-level courses. Further, the College of Basic or General Studies would be in a stronger position to insure parity in workload, benefits, and status between basic skills faculty and regular faculty and to promote faculty activity in basic skills research and problem-solving.

In the interim, basic skills faculty are continuing and broadening their efforts to reach content-area faculty through informal workshops and consultation services. A follow-up study is planned to assess the long-term effect of these faculty development activities in the content areas to student achievement.

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